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ABSTRACT

Investigated with 110 university students taking an introductory gifted education course were the relationships between sex, three instructional levels (elementary, secondary, and special education), and reasons for taking the course. Data was collected over a 4-year period. Six reasons for taking the course were identified, which included that some students were curious about the gifted and creative; and that the major portion of the teachers were from elementary education and female. (SBH)

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# REASONS FOR TAKING A COURSE ABOUT THE GIFTED

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The teacher still remains as one of the most neglected variables in the study of gifted and creative youngsters with unique learning and educational needs. This viewpoint was supported much earlier by Gowan and Demos (1964):

> "One of the educational phenomena of our times, which the future will find almost impossibly difficult to explain or account for is the almost total lack of attention to the selection and training of teachers of the gifted." p. 382.

Lazar (1970) indicated that a major factor for consideration in planning to support an adequate instructional program for the gifted and creative students was a teacher that had the capability of meeting individual student learning styles, affective needs, creative interests, and powerful cognitive abilities. This requires a viable teacher training program at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Much of the teacher training is now done at the in-service level because so few institutions of higher education offer a comprehensive training program for those interested in teaching the gifted and creative.

Yet, there does appear to be emerging a national awareness concerning the gifted and creative in our society and their unique educational needs. One aspect of this emerging national awareness is teacher training.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to focus on the teacher training variable for gifted education at the pre-service level. Effort was directed toward three factors: sex, three instructional levels, and reasons for taking the course. An initial pilot study was reported earlier by Lazar (1973).

Three questions directed the research effort:

1. What are the reasons for taking an elective course concerning gifted education ?

2. What is the ratio between males and females taking the course ?

3. What is the ratio of student representation from three identified levels of instructional preparation ?

## PROCEDURE

Data was collected over a four year period by the same university instructor using a uniformed administrative and collection procedure. An entry behavior test used to make a needs assessment was used as the instrument to collect the data. The test was administered to the class members at the first meeting.

Subjects: The sample consisted of 110 university students (34 male and 76 female) taking an introductory course dealing with gifted education. The sample was drawn from the same course over a four year period involving four classes. Sixty-six members of the sample were teachers in the field, while the remaining forty-four were working toward their initial credential. The group had an age span of 22 to 58 years, with a mean age of 28.

Data: The data was collected through the use of structured and implanted questions as part of a general entry behavior test given at the start of the term at the first meeting.

Results: Six major categories were used to group the reasons cited for taking an elective course about gifted education. In Table 1. the main reason was a basic interest in the gifted and talented per se which accounted for 64.5 per cent of the total number of reasons. The five other reasons were about equal in ranking. A sex breakout is provided in Table 2.

When instructional levels are compared, it was found that 58.2 per cent were in elementary education and 28.2 per cent in secondary education. This is a 2 to 1 ration favoring the elementary instructional level. One explanation might be that most elementary teachers work in a self-contained setting and must be with the same gifted youngster for the entire day and

term, if not the academic year, whereas their secondary colleagues operate in a departmentalized setting, thus having less time exposure with a given gifted child per se. The third instructional level consisted of individuals in special education. This group accounted for 13.6 per cent. Special education had a 2 to 1 ratio favoring secondary, and a slightly more than 4 to 1 ratio favoring elementary.

The third and final question of the study was concerned with the ratio of males and females. In table 1. it will be seen that the females in this study had a little better than a 2 to 1 ratio. It should be noted that while a 2 to 1 ratio between the sexes existed, the ratio did reflect the male and female enrollments in teacher training per se at the university from which the sample was taken.

In the first meeting after the administration of the entry behavior test, the instructor asked those who gave their reason as being "interested in the gifted" to further clarify what they meant. Thus, the major reason was further differentiated into the following four reasons:

1. Some felt that their major area of elementary or secondary education failed to provide sufficient information concerning identification and special teaching methods and curriculum adaptations for the gifted and talented.

2. Some stated an immediate need for knowledge and help to assist them with gifted youngsters in their current classrooms.

3. Some expressed a curiosity about the gifted and creative, yet did not view themselves as gifted or creative.

4. Some had been in gifted programs as students, but were now confronted with the need to help their own children now in gifted programs because of problems emerging.

These latter reasons provide more meaningful insight as to why some individuals take an elective course about the gifted. They also offer educators in higher education a justification as to why such courses are needed and the kind of target populations to be served.

While subjective in nature, the instructor concluded from observation and discussion that a selective factor might also be involved regarding those electing such a course. Most of the students displayed a curiosity, independence, autonomy, and high energy level. These are similar to what Roe (1960) concluded about the creative scientist. Further research comparing teachers of the gifted with regular or other special education teachers is recommended to ascertain the efficacy of the observation made by the instructor in this study. More specifically,

do teachers of the gifted differ from other teachers, and in what manner is such difference manifested ?

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the reasons why individuals elected a course concerned with gifted education. Six reasons were identified, with the one major reason being divided into four sub-reasons. The major portion of the teachers were from elementary education and female. An understanding of why individuals are taking a specific course allows both the instructor and students to better achieve their instructional goals and objectives regarding the education of the gifted and creative.

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TABLE 1.

ANALYSIS OF CATEGORIES BY REASONS,
INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL, AND SEX

| CATEGORY | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| A. Main Reason: | | |
| 1. credential | 7 | 6.4 |
| 2. MS degree | 5 | 4.5 |
| 3. instructor | 12 | 10.9 |
| 4. interest in gifted | 71 | 64.5 |
| 5. parent of gifted child | 7 | 6.4 |
| 6. miscellaneous | 8 | 7.3 |
| TOTAL | 110 | 100.0 |
| B. Instructional Level: | | |
| 1. elementary | 64 | 58.2 |
| 2. secondary | 31 | 28.2 |
| 3. special education | 15 | 13.6 |
| TOTAL | 110 | 100.0 |
| C. Sex: | | |
| 1. male | 34 | 31.0 |
| 2. female | 76 | 69.0 |
| TOTAL | 110 | 100.0 |

TABLE 2.

ANALYSIS OF REASONS BY SEX

| MAIN REASON CITED | MALE N | MALE % | FEMALE N | FEMALE % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. credential | 2 | 5.9 | 5 | 6.6 |
| 2. MS degree | 3 | 8.8 | 2 | 2.6 |
| 3. instructor | 4 | 11.8 | 8 | 10.5 |
| 4. interest in gifted | 20 | 58.8 | 51 | 67.1 |
| 5. parent of gifted child | 1 | 2.9 | 6 | 7.9 |
| 6. miscellaneous | 4 | 11.8 | 4 | 5.3 |
| TOTAL | 34 | 100.0 | 76 | 100.0 |